

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
PROGRESS REPORT
2012

Participant Update

As of December 2012, there are 1,938 certified Master Hunters in good standing. Find below a summary of participation in the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) since 2008 when it replaced the former Advanced Hunter Education Program.

Table of Certified Master Hunters

Certifications	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Applicants	1,034	1,288	806	708	510
Newly certified	75	290	150	132	83
Renewals	145	255	241	163	210
Total certified	1,514	1,892	1,956	1,975	1,938

A total of eight applicants were denied entry into the program during 2012 based upon criminal background check information.

There were 179 applicants that actually took the Master Hunter examination. Of those, 49 passed on the first attempt; 44 passed on the second attempt; and 32 failed on the second and last attempt. Of the applicants, ten passed the examination but failed to complete other certification requirements.

The number of Master Hunters failing to renew their certification has averaged about 42% each year since 2008

Master Hunters Failing to Renew

Master Hunters	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Failed to renew	85	154	209	140	144
Percentage	37.0%	37.7%	46.4%	46.2%	40.7%

Master Hunter Advisory Group

During the calendar year, Mike Estes was chair through March and Mike Britton was chair for the remainder of the year.

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) conducted five formal business meetings in 2012, all in Ellensburg. Notes for the January 13th, March 23rd, June 15th, August 29th, and December 14th meetings were all posted on the MHPP website (http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/advisory_groups/meeting_notes.html).

Program Refinements

Improvements were made to the MHPP webpage including the addition of situational ethics, a 20th anniversary summary, frequently asked questions update, on-line forms update, testing schedule and locations, updated CORT training connection to Eyes-in-the-Woods Program, updated progress reports, updated MHAG membership page, updated meeting summaries (notes), MHPP Certification trends information, and enhanced volunteer projects coordination with on-line connection.

Two new MHPP applicant tests were developed for use during future open enrollment periods. Fifteen new or revised questions were substituted to address clarity issues.

A few MHAG members tried to become volunteer program coordinators with mixed results. A presentation by James Chandler explained the WDFW Community Event Registration & Volunteer Information System (CERVIS) program, which is a purchased computer software program to assist in coordination of volunteers. Continuing efforts have been made using and not using this system. Most of the Master Hunter volunteer opportunities listed on the MHPP webpage have also been posted on CERVIS.

A combined CORT Class and Master Hunter examination session were successfully tested in September. The concept may be expanded in the future.

Invitations were sent to 205 Master Hunters from Region 5 (Vancouver) for a BBQ/Trap Shoot. Seventeen persons responded. Master Hunters were invited to bring a first-time-hunter. Attendees were not charged, some brought family members. A Region 5 WDFW biologist gave a talk about volunteer opportunities for gate monitoring on Weyco timber land. Next year's Region 5 event will likely involve gathering for a volunteer project, followed by a potluck.

Communications and Outreach

Meetings were held in all six WDFW regions in June to discuss WDFW use of volunteers, specifically Master Hunters. The meetings were attended by Sgt. Klein, Mike Kuttel, and various MHAG members and Regional staff. A follow up meeting with Chief Bjork and Wildlife Assistant Director Nate Pamplin occurred to summarize and discuss information learned from the meetings.

Walt Christensen, former chair of the Game Management Advisory Committee (GMAC), has participated in MHAG discussions and mutual invitations for meeting attendance and cooperation has been extended. Discussions regarding hunter recruitment and retention with WDFW and other partners continue.

Policy and Programmatic

An ALEA Grant application was discussed but never applied for this cycle. An enhanced landowner access program and a program to retain existing hunters and encourage those completing Hunter Education training to become lifelong hunters are being coordinated with the Wildlife Program and other WDFW staff.

The MHAG has worked with Anthony Novak on his Central Washington University Hunter Behavior Survey.

The MHAG assisted Dave Ware and the Wildlife Program in the development of Master Hunter Hunt Guidelines as well as criteria for Master Hunter Hunt Coordinators, Master Hunter hunt opportunities, and the use of hotspot /ranked list hunts. Criteria developed were consistent with the MHPP not being considered another user group, and with Commission Policy C-6005.

A Volunteer Coordinator Summit has been discussed and efforts were made to have MHAG leaders plus MHAG advisors and Law Enforcement Program Chief, Bruce Bjork, Wildlife Program Assistant Director, Nate Pamplin, and other staff meet to discuss how the WDFW could best implement creditable volunteer work projects. WDFW field staff participation has been inconsistent creating problems for WDFW and prospective Master Hunters because landowner concerns are not being adequately addressed. In August, Sergeant Carl Klein met with Mike Kuttel, AD Pamplin, Chief Bjork, Lt. Crown, and Dave Ware to begin discussions on the issues brought forth by the MHAG and Regional staff. Positive coordination was achieved, without direct participation by MHAG members.

MHAG participated in discussions regarding December Master Hunter seasons in GMU's #127-142. Although the MHAG is prohibited by Commission policy from participation in making recommendations for Master Hunter seasons, the Wildlife Program specifically requested such input. The Selkirk Elk Plan process, and input from Master Hunters and involved landowners resulted in a compromise season providing December cow elk only hunting in GMU 127 and GMU 130 for Master Hunters.

Program Integrity

During 2012, 1 Master Hunter was removed from the MHPP for life due to a conviction related to a Title 77 RCW violation. In addition, 1 individual voluntarily turned in his Master Hunter certification card in lieu of a formal suspension proceeding. This is the third year that the special Master Hunter identifier (MH) has been added to WDFW licensing documents in order to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules.

Future Direction

(Note: Applicants to the MHPP must provide a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer conservation hours and existing Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer conservation hours every five years in order to renew their membership)

The MHAG encourages WDFW to establish Volunteer Coordinators in each of the six Regional Offices in order to maximize and properly focus volunteer efforts in the field.

Currently the majority of volunteer time provided by Master Hunters is provided to organizations and agencies other than WDFW. It is hoped that the focus of most future Master Hunter volunteer efforts will be on WDFW projects falling under the following general categories:

- Retention of Hunters in Washington. Currently less than 50% of Hunter Education graduates actually purchase a hunting license in Washington. Of those that do purchase a hunting license well over half no longer are hunting within five years. Less than 3% of Washington residents currently hunt and the hunter replacement rate is estimated to be .46. The heritage of hunting is at stake, as is a dependable funding source for WDFW to manage game populations.

The MHAG would like to partner with WDFW, the Game Management Advisory Committee (GMAC), non-profit conservation organizations, and businesses to promote mentoring opportunities for first-time-hunters and youth and to facilitate hunting opportunities and incentives that yield more life-long participants in the sport of hunting. The biggest issue with such a venture will continue to be liability. Securing appropriate liability insurance will be key as will the development and compliance with necessary policies (parent/guardian must be present; no one-on-one; two mentors at all times on the premises; etc.).

It is very important that WDFW conduct a valid survey of Hunter Education graduates, past and present, to determine the impediments they feel exist that prevent them from becoming live-long hunters. Once done, those factors that can be controlled or influenced should become targeted initiatives. There are many

examples of successful recruitment and retention techniques already being used by other states that WDFW should evaluate. They include providing those that take the one-time, once-in-a-lifetime Hunter Education deferral with a bonus drawing point so they have an incentive to hunt and apply for special drawing during subsequent years; providing Hunter Education graduates with a bonus drawing point if they purchase a hunting license and tags the year they receive their Hunter Education certificate; offering a free hunting and fishing license to first-time-hunters; providing special early seasons in game damage areas for first-time-hunters so that there is an incentive for mentors to engage without losing their own hunting opportunity. Plus, WDFW should consider offering joint permits for both a mentor and first-time-hunter allowing both to harvest animals in traditional game depredation zones (would require that a parent/guardian also be present); tying landowner agreements for game damage directly to increased, but controlled, access for first-time-hunters/youth and their mentors (Hunting by Reservation); providing more permit opportunities for first-time-hunters/youth to control damage wildlife teaming up with Master Hunters who also could harvest an animal (would require that a parent/guardian also be present).

In addition, the MHAG would like to partner with WDFW, non-profit organizations, and businesses to promote and conduct Hunter Training Clinics as well as to develop “how-to” information about hunting to be made available on the web. Clinics and “how-to” information would be aimed at individuals with five or fewer years of hunting experience.

- Improved Recreational Access to Private Lands. Lack of access has been identified as the #1 issue facing hunters and hunting in the State of Washington. Each Region now has a Wildlife Program staff person working on private land access issues and opportunities.

The MHAG would like to partner with WDFW, non-profit conservation organizations, and businesses, to promote improved access to key private lands throughout the State. More involvement in the new Hunt by Reservation Program, and Register to Hunt Program would be welcomed. Tasks such as signage maintenance, litter control, parking area maintenance and establishment, fencing, patrolling, and landowner outreach could be conducted by Master Hunters.

- Control of Game Depredation. Control of game damage in sensitive settings requiring special skills has been one of the primary purposes of the MHPP since its inception. Master Hunter general hunts and permit hunts have been designed to best address game damage and landowner concerns. Master Hunters routinely assist landowners with fence repair and construction and assist WDFW Law Enforcement Officers with necessary herding.

The MHAG encourages WDFW to explore approaches that provide opportunities for Master Hunters to mentor first-time-hunters/youth allowing both the Master Hunter and first-time-hunter/youth to harvest antlerless elk or deer to address damage issues.

- Critical Habitat Protection and Habitat Enhancement. The number one issue facing wildlife today is the loss of habitat, primarily through urbanization. Some sources claim that over 30,000 acres of habitat are lost in the State of Washington each year. Although habitats are easy to damage, fortunately most habitats can be improved. The priority should always be to protect critical habitat while it still exists and then to improve habitat whenever possible.

The MHAG recognizes that WDFW owns and controls over 800,000 acres of mostly critical wildlife habitat statewide. Maintaining those lands has always been a budgetary challenge. Master Hunters should be actively engaged by WDFW in specific projects to address the highest priority needs on agency lands, including monitoring under the Citizen Science Initiative.

The WDFW and the MHAG must work together to determine how Master Hunters can best assist the department. Although the MHPP should not be treated or viewed as a user group, there remains a need for incentives so that sufficient numbers of Master Hunters are maintained to address the volunteer priorities of WDFW.

The MHAG and Master Hunters should be engaged by WDFW to play a key role in implementing existing Landowner Access Grants. Reasonable

travel and sometimes per diem costs for volunteers will be necessary to execute this crucial interaction.

A tutelage program that transitions new hunters smoothly into obtaining hunting access and opportunities will help perpetuate hunting as we know it.

Most of the volunteer assistance provided by Master Hunters and many of the policy issues related to the MHPP relate directly to the Wildlife Program as opposed to the Law Enforcement Program within which the MHPP is now managed. That coordination challenge must be better addressed in the near future.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the MHPP, a freeze on enrollment was put in place in December while the WDFW Administration works with the MHAG to more clearly outline expectations for the future direction and roles of the program.